

South Wales boat exhibition has rival English shows in its sights

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A WELSH boat show is aiming to rival the UK's top exhibitions in London and Southampton.

Organisers of the South Wales Boat Show predict revenue created by the exhibition will be around 30% up on last year's £1.5m.

They say the show, held in Margam Park, Neath Port Talbot, is tapping into a growing interest in Wales in boating and yachting.

With a crop of new marinas around the country Wales has become a hot spot for keen boaters.

The show's organiser Ben Sutcliffe said everything is in place to make Wales a centre for watersports and boating.

He said the repercussions for the wider Welsh economy were also positive, with jobs being created in the manufacturing and service sectors.

Last year, the show – which attracted 11,000 visitors – was tipped by Yachting World to rival the long-running London Boat Show.

It is the biggest marine event in Wales and is being held on Friday, June 15 to Sunday, June 17.

Mr Sutcliffe said, "There is no reason why, in a couple of years, we cannot lead in this area.

"We have the infrastructure and there are enough people who like boating and watersports for it to get bigger."

This year's South Wales Boat Show will have around 150 exhibitors, with many companies launching their products for the first time in the UK.

"A necklace of marinas are being put in around the Welsh coast," he said.

"There is a huge market for boats and the industry is a lot more accessible than people would think.

"There are boats that cost as little as a few hundred pounds, rather than thousands – it is not an exclusive leisure activity."

Marinas and waterfront residential and business centres are increasingly being used by cities and towns as regeneration projects – Cardiff and Swansea are the highest-profile developments in Wales.

Burry Port, near Llanelli, is transforming itself from a former industrial town into a centre for boaters and watersports enthusiasts after creating a 500-berth marina.

Increased demand for boating berths throughout Wales has also prompted established marinas to expand their sites.

Aberystwyth is expanding its 100-capacity site to attract those visiting the picturesque Cardigan

Bay.

Plans were this year submitted for a £100m waterfront development in the heart of Pembroke Dock. It would include 260 marina berths, with 450 homes, mainly apartments, including 140 houses with a waterfront view and potential marina berth.

But there has been opposition to expansion from some areas of Wales.

Proposed plans to turn Fishguard Harbour into a marina with 540 berths have been delayed and the expansion of Pwllheli Marina has met opposition from Gwynedd Council, amid fears it would threaten the Welsh language and create too many second homes in the area.

Mr Sutcliffe estimates that the boating industry employs around 5,000 people in South Wales.

He said, "Production of boats is coming to Wales, while there are people across the country who repair and make boats. It is becoming vital to the Welsh economy."

Margam Park's lake level is being raised so it can be used by visitors to the show.

It will also feature a 40-tonne beach feature with a pirate ship, provided by Neath Port Talbot Council.